

TEHUANTEPEC Isthmus MUSIC AND CULTURE

Leon Gilberto Medellin Lopez
Karawitan Department, ISI Surakarta
karawitan11@gmail.com

Zá (Zapotec) and *Ikoots* (Huave) music

Saa in zapotec language can be translated as “celebration” but also it refers directly to “dance” and indirectly to “music”. Everyday in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec there is *Saa*. Then, to understand the tight relationship between music and culture it is fundamental to analyze how music in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec evolved and transformed since early prehispanic days, through the Spanish colonization, the Independence period, the Revolution and modernity and global era (that can be read as nowadays). During this conference there will be historical, anthropological and mainly musical and ethnomusicological analysis with some archaeological and linguistic references. Isthmus of Tehuantepec can be recognized by its percussions like turtle shell and wooden double headed drums, *carrizo** flutes from its pre-Columbian period. After that, we can meet some of the newcomers like the African marimba, the Spanish guitar, and finally the trumpet and during 20th century the popularization of the saxophone in the region. Also there will be some symbols that remained from pre-Columbian beliefs, well preserved inside oral tradition and plasmated in 20th century's song's lyrics. As well, the analysis of the dialectical evolution of this region's music by understanding pre-Columbian rhythms with baroque Spanish harmonies and musical forms. So then, there can be shown a landscape of how music influences in the daily life of isthmian communities.

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1. Geographical connotations

Isthmus of Tehuantepec is an important geographical region located in North America, in the Mexican Republic in the east part of Oaxaca State. It is politically divided in two, the west part is the Tehuantepec district and the East part is the Juchitán district.

2. Archeological implications

Isthmus of Tehuantepec have always been a multicultural region, according to Victor de la Cruz there was mixes (who finally were pushed to move to the *sierra*) and huaves before the zapotec and aztec wars. After many historical events, we can say that the isthmus region was the last part to be conquered by the zapotec empire that came from the oaxaquean plateau until they reach the isthmus, but also that region -in the version of some historians- was already conquered by the aztecs. Giving as a result mainly a new Zapotec culture -due to the geographical differences, in the plateau is cold and there can be cultivated a variety of vegetables and in the isthmus where the fishing became the main activity. Making this last difference one of the main the factors why the “zapotec” cultures are so different among each other, probably since the zapotec empire expansion.

3. Zá, Saa ne izá

To speak about the zapotecs, we find a difficulty in the term itself. Zapotec in English is a simple transliteration from the word *zapoteco* or *zapoteca* that refers mainly to a culture/empire/language/ethnicity. *Zapoteco* at the same time came from the Nahuatl -aztec language- *zapochtecal*. *Zá* means cloud in zapotec language and *pochtecatl* means trader in nahuatl, according to Victor de la Cruz in quoting Wilfrido C. Cruz document that *Zapochtecatl* -or *Zapoteca* in Spanish- was a way to traders to identify themselves among other traders in Tenochtitlan (pre-Spaniard Mexico City).⁸⁶

Binnigula'sa' is the word to define ancient zapotec culture and people. It has a lot of meanings like “the men who came from the clouds” or in other poetical interpretations “the men who was dispersed by de dance”. In some stories the *binnigula'sa'* are depicted like giants.

Binnizá is a two component word *binni-* people and *zá-* cloud.

Other meanings for that can be found are

Zá: Cloud (noun)

Zá: butter/fat (noun) -probably this bisemic/polysemic comes from the comparison of the white buter with the color of the white clouds-

Lasá: Walk (imperative plural)

Saa: Celebration

Many times authors wanted to specify that zapotec is a wide term that includes many contemporary cultures that it makes it confusing to use it in an anthropological research, nevertheless, even the INALI (National Institute of Indigenous Languages) still making the mistake to consider zapotec language as one instead as what it actually is, a language family. To avoid this, isthmus zapotec writers prefer the word *binnizá* or in Spanish *Zá*. This last is which I will be introducing time by time as well in this article.

4. Ancient Zacosmovision (*Binnigula'sa'*) and their instruments: turtle shells, flutes.

In nowadays lyrics (within the folkloric repertoire) of the 20th century recordings, contemporary literature and mostly in its most ancient source, the oral traditions we can find 3 stages of the Za beliefs:

⁸⁶From Cruz, Victor de la “El Pensamiento de los *binnigula'sa'*: cosmovisión, religión y calendario, con especial referencia a los *binnizá*, UNAM Press, Mexico 2003

- I. Animism: This can be found through the understanding of the influence of the supernatural power and influence of the YagaBioongo' (*ceiba* or *pochote* in Spanish) *Ceibaesculifolia*⁸⁷ tree in Za's people fates.
- II. Polytheism⁸⁸: This can be found through the belief in the Goddess of the Underworld (not necessarily “hell” but simply where all corpses go when life is gone). Xunaxido', the Goddess of the Sea nd Death. Who, at the end of the physical existence of the *binnizá* (individually) will take the *binnizá* in Her arms.
- III. Monotheism: *Bidó'* the generic name of the Divinity. Etymologically, *Bi* can be translated as “wind” while *Dó'* can be translated as “almighty” or “supreme”. On Wilfrido C. Cruz cited by Victor de la Cruz says “... *pi* means ‘vital breath’; as Wilfrido C. Cruz: [...] it is a radical particle that generally accompanies the name of animals and the plants or those of natural phenomena that implies action and movility, it is the *pe,pi, be, bi*, name of air, breath[ing], the element that animates everything that lives or moves and it can mean imperative action o past action [...]”⁸⁹

In other this, there still few records about what was the music of the Mesoamerican in specific and about the zapotecs and the ikoots in particular. But so far, we can find flutes made from *Phragmitesaustralis*/common reed grass. There can be found double headed drums -in ikoots cultures- and emptied turtle-shells -in zapotec cultures- as percussions also. The rhythm from here is very important to analyze that is, some of the rhythms are in 6/8-3/4 like this:

Percussion

Perc.

That is a basic rhythm that can be found from what is left of the traditional Mesoamerican music until traditional music in the syncretism with Spaniard influences, i.e., the *son ikoots* (with traditional flute and percussion) and then observing the traditional syncretic *son bigu* (in a guitar, windbrass or marimba version).

4a. Review On Ikoots Heritage, Similes And Differences With Isthmus Za Cultural Development

Even there can be found so many differences between Ikoots and Binnizá cultures, mainly in their languages and therefore in their worldview; but, in the other hand there can be observed that many of their costumes, dresses and gastronomy are almost the same. There can be two possibilities, or the ancient ikoots where incultrized into the zá culture or there was a mixture among zá and ikoots.

⁸⁷Botanical information from Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, National Ethnobotanical Herbarium Online, Washington, 2015. url: <https://neho.si.edu/>

⁸⁸ Diverse advocations of the divinity do not necessarily contradicts the belief in one God, as happens as well in Hinduism

⁸⁹ From Cruz, Victor de la “El Pensamiento de los *binnigula'sa*”: cosmovisión, religión y calendario, con especial referencia a los *binnizá*, UNAM Press, Mexico 2003

5. Spaniard Conquer*: The Aculturization Of The Musical System, Adoption Of Musical Forms Like The *Son* And The *Fandango* And The Adoption Of New Musical Instruments Like The Guitar, The Trumpet And The Marimba.

In 1942, it is recorded that Christopher Columbus and his crew made the first contact with Americas, after that, it was Hernan Cortés duty to conquer Mesoamerica and turn it into a colony lately called “*Nueva España*” or, the New Spain. With that colonization a new paradigm was brought to Mesoamerica. Among a new language, a new lifestyle there was also a new religion and its practices.

Catholicism was the new religious standard for Mesoamerica, what meant that local religions were forbid from both missionaries and Spaniard conquerors. With that, many symbols as well as many religious and artistic expressions were forgotten and some other were hidden inside traditional practices. Unfortunately, most of the musical expressions and instruments were forbid as well.

On the other hand, with the Spaniard occupation they brought as well European instruments like the baroque guitar and the African xylophone *marimba*, probably also the trumpet and the violin but there's not much evidence when exactly these instruments came to Mesoamerica, but we can explain that the violin as a folk instrument is mainly used by the *Huasteco* ethnic group in Central Mexico that makes this specific case out of the reach of the present article.

To explain in deep about the case of the baroque guitar we can just observe two Americas guitars that have been used in Americas until today that is the *Jarana* (from Central Veracruz state, in Mexico) and the *Charango* (from de Andean region in South America), that are constructed more closely like a baroque guitar rather than a baroque lute or even like a modern guitar.

During this period is also when the original musical tuning systems and forms where almost completely switched from the native Mesoamerican to the Spaniard/European standards, introducing in the whole continent the recent paradigm of mayor and minor diatonic scales. As well the introduction of the *son* a Latin rooted word that in English could be simply translated as “tune” and the *fandango* that was in fact a Spanish baroque folk dance conserved closer to its original thanks to baroque composers like Domenico Scarlatti and others. According to Israel J. Katz on his note on Fandango:

“A couple-dance in triple metre and lively tempo, accompanied by a guitar and castanets or palmas (hand-clapping). It is considered the most widespread of Spain's traditional dances. The sung fandango is in two parts: an introduction (or variaciones), which is instrumental, and a cante, consisting of four or five octosyllabic verses (coplas) or musical phrases (tercios), sometimes six if a verse (usually the first) is repeated. Its metre, associated with that of the bolero and seguidilla, was originally notated in 6/8, but later in 3/8 or 3/4.

Its origins are uncertain, but its etymology may lie in the Portuguese fado (from Lat. *fatum*: ‘destiny’); in early 16th-century Portugal the term *esfandangado* designated a popular song. The earliest fandango melody appears in the anonymous *Libro de diferentes cifras de guitarra* (E-Mn M.811; 1705), while its earliest (albeit brief) description is found in a letter dated 17 March 1712 by Martín Martí, a Spanish priest. The term's first appearance in a stage work is in Francisco de Leefadeal's *tremé El novio de la aldeana* (Seville, early 1720s). By the late 18th century it had become fashionable among the aristocracy as well as an important feature in *tonadillas*, *zarzuelas*, *ballets* and other stage works.

Various suggestions have been made about the fandango's origins, including that it is related to the *soléa*, *jabera* and *petenera* (Calderón); that the Andalusian *malagueña*, *granadina*, *murciana* and *rondeña* are in fact fandangos accompanied by guitar and castanets (Ocón); that its forebears include the *canario* and *gitano* (Foz); that it is derived from the *jota*

aragonesa (Larramendi, Ribera), although Ribera also proposed an earlier Arabic origin; and that the Arabic fandûra (guitar) may be a possible etymological source (Pottier). Yet the two prevailing theories point to either a West Indian or Latin American origin (Diccionario de Autoridades), although Puyana strongly suggests that the fandango indiano came from Mexico; (see also Osorio); or a North African origin (Moreau de Saint-Méry).

One must distinguish between the varied provincial forms that the classical fandango assumed through multi-regional Spain during the 18th and early 19th centuries, and its role in Flamenco, in which it approaches cantejondo, with its florid and non-metric performance, in contrast to the fandanguillo of cantechico”⁹⁰

The fandango within the isthmus zapotec culture have been preserved in the brass version entitled *Fandango Tehuano* and *Fandango Teco*, there's a possibility that those fandangos were brought by Spanish musicians and then adopted by *binnizá* people during the baroque period and finally it became a traditional form according to contemporary musicians. This conclusion can be defended by observing that there's no connection between baroque music specialists and zátraditional musicians.

6. Independence, Reform and Revolution periods

From 1810 until 1821 the independence war from the Spaniard colony was fought and won by the Mexican national heroes. That brought a new national paradigm. In 1957 president Benito Juarez among many things he did he made the Laws of Reform that made Mexico a Secular State with the separation of the Church and the Government. And at the end of the 19th century, president Porfirio Diaz brought the French culture and helped to develop the train system. Lately his dictatorship was revoked at the Revolution that longed since 1910 until 1917.

During this last period probably the Waltz (*Valsin* Spanish) was also popularized in the isthmus as well as in other regions of the country, folk songs like *La Llorona* and *La Sandunga* can be analyzed in order to find this connection.

7. Twentieth Century, Cinema, Radio and Tv Influences

On the 1940's during the WWII the radio, cinema and the tv became more and more popular worldwide. In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was not the exception. In fact, radio become so popular as well as the national Mexican films that they helped to unify the country cultural and including that linguistically and musically. Mariachi was known then in the isthmus but until today it has been seen as foreign music to say that it has never been a vivid part of this region. *Bolero*, *Chachachá*, *Mambo* was the music which became popular in the region. And in the 1970's and 1980's the Colombian *Cumbia* Became Popular In The Whole Country, Including The Isthmus Region.

8. Twentieth First Century and The Attempts To Unify The “Latino” Culture and The Era of Globalization

Nowadays, many factors are being influencing the isthmus folk that in its expressions is getting less attention by the isthmus society mainly because of the cultural influences f USA n a globalized era. That is, Mexican *banda* music is becoming a favorite genre not caring about the lack of aesthetics in that recording industry. Also, younger generations are being introduced to play Brazilian *batucada* instead of traditional music to accompany diverse

⁹⁰FromKatz, Israel J. “Fandango” Online file. Url: https://onedrive.live.com/redir?resid=2E4ADD32FE574421!97657&authkey=!AOM_Pd4Z1LwE9mw&ithint=file%2chtm

traditional parades. On the other hand, zapotec*diidxazá* language is being preserved somehow by rap and pop music scene mainly from Juchitan City.

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